

TRANSLATION

Acceptance Speech
Prof. James A. Thomson

Co-Winner of the 2011
King Faisal International Prize for Medicine

33rd Awards Ceremony
Sunday 13 March 2011 (8.4.1432H)

HRH Prince Nayef Ibn Abd Al-Aziz Al-Saud
Second Deputy Premier and
Minister of Interior
Your Highnesses
Your Excellencies
Distinguished Guests

It is a great honor to stand before you today a co-recipient of the King Faisal International Prize and a guest of Saudi Arabia. I would like to convey my deep appreciation to the King Faisal Foundation, its distinguished executives, and the members of the award committee for their work in graciously extending this honor.

It is appropriate to accept this award alongside my friend and colleague Dr. Yamanaka because, while it is true that scientists often achieve - and are recognized for that achievement - as individuals, the fact remains that our ideas are rarely entirely our own. The history of science is the story of a great collectivity. Today, as in the 11th century, when Alhazen was laying the foundations for the scientific method, the pursuit of knowledge exists as a human passion that unites us all. Today, when my son does his algebra, his ability to do so is shaped by powerful gifts from the 9th century: mathematical symbolism, quadratic equations, and the algorithm. Today, when I urge my students to re-evaluate existing scientific knowledge, to dare to question the accuracy of the field's underlying assumptions, I do so because Islamic scholars also had the critical insight to begin questioning their own scientific inheritance. Clearly, it takes centuries, and the accumulative work of countless critical minds, to make groundbreaking discoveries and to craft tools useful in the betterment of all people everywhere. I am pleased to be recognized for my efforts in extending this tradition.

It is my hope that our efforts to understand pluripotent stem cells will one day give way to clinical applications capable of improving the quality of people's lives. I thank you for acknowledging the importance of this field and the important role scientific inquiry plays in the life of all nations and all people. I am humbled by this honor and will cherish my memories of this experience for a long time to come.